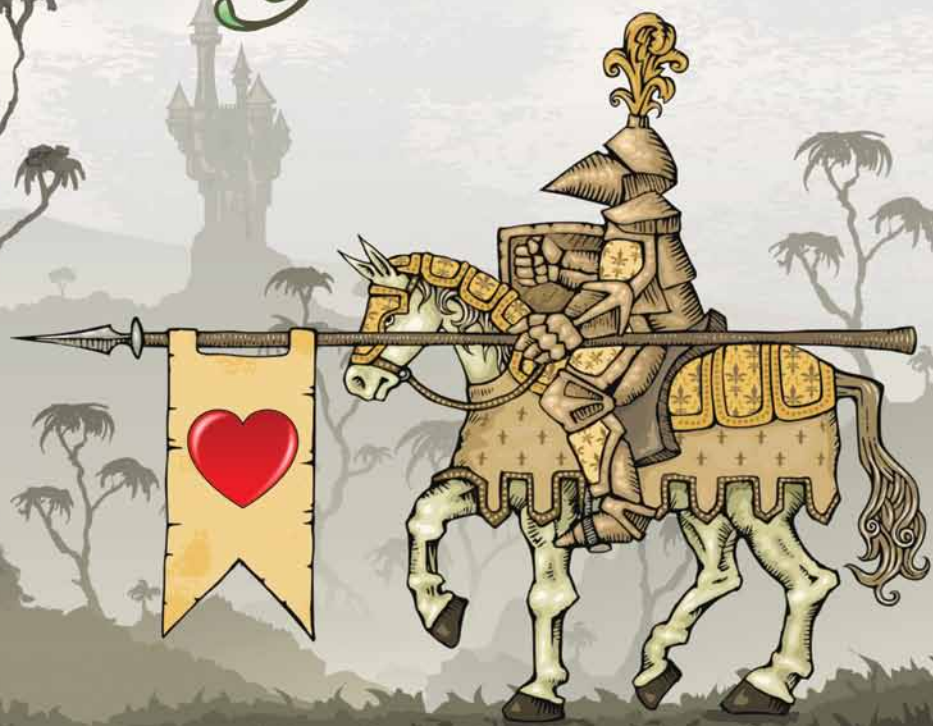


The
Canterbury
Bridge
Tales



David Silver & Tim Bourke



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Canterbury
Bridge
Tales

The title is rendered in a decorative, blackletter-style font. The word 'The' is small and positioned above 'Canterbury'. 'Canterbury' is the largest word, with a large, stylized 'C' that incorporates a wheel and stars. 'Bridge' is below it, with a large 'B' that features a skull and lightning bolts. 'Tales' is at the bottom, with a large 'T' that has wings and a crown-like top. The letters are interconnected and feature various gothic and industrial motifs.

David Silver & Tim Bourke

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PROLOGUE

March, with its gray skies and rain, had banished wintry February and bathed at least a few days in chilly sunshine, through which beckoned the Spring Nationals bridge tournament — a little later than usual this year. The bridge community was making its triannual pilgrimage to distant cities. This time, they were traveling from the far corners of North America to Canterbury, Florida, seeking masterpoints of every hue — platinum, gold, silver, even gray and pink.

It is a long drive from Toronto to Canterbury, and there were many of us on the road in the days before the tournament was due to start. My partner and I checked into a hotel in Walterboro, South Carolina, aiming to continue on our pilgrimage to Florida the next day. Perhaps I should not have been surprised, as I relaxed in the lobby that evening with the latest edition of USA Today, to see a succession of others arrive at the same hotel — all clearly bridge folk with the same destination in mind. It was natural for us all to gather in the lounge, fall into conversation, tell stories of Nationals past and imminent, and of course share a hand or two.

My first conversation that evening was with a fellow I knew slightly and recognized as a fellow Canadian. He was a Bronze Life Master, a man who was perhaps the most ethical player I have ever met. From the time he first picked up a bridge hand, he played the game with a kind of chivalry, believing in truth, honor, and courtesy. His opponents respected him as a gentle yet skillful foe. He had come from Handover, Ontario, to compete at the Nationals despite the distressing news that Bruce Gowdy would also be there.

“Although there’s not much point in playing if Bruce is going to be there,” he commented. “You’re competing for second place.”

“But I heard Bruce had given up tournaments and was running a duplicate game in a retirement home?” I responded.

“He had,” he replied, “but last fall he announced that he would be re-enlisting in the bridge wars. Everyone was quite surprised.”

“What happened?”

“Well, it all started at his birthday party...”

“That sounds intriguing — tell me more.”

And his tale began.

1

THE BRONZE LIFE MASTER'S TALE

When Mr. Bruce Gowdy of Handsover, Ontario, announced that he would shortly be celebrating his eleventy-first birthday with a party of special magnificence, there was much talk and excitement in the Handsover Bridge Club.

Bruce was very famous and very peculiar, and had been the wonder of the club for more than ninety years, since becoming the youngest player ever to win the Spingold. The trophies he had brought back from his travels had become a local legend, and it was popularly believed, whatever the veteran bridge players might say, that his apartment in Handsover was filled with souvenirs of his many victories in North America and Europe. And if that were not enough for fame, there was also his prolonged vigor to marvel at. Time wore on, but it seemed to have little effect on Mr. Gowdy. At ninety he was much the same as at fifty. At ninety-nine they began to call him “well-preserved,” but “unchanged” would have been nearer the mark. There were some who shook their heads and thought this was too much of a good thing; it seemed unfair that anyone should possess (apparently) perpetual middle age as well as (reputedly) inexhaustible bridge skills.

Bruce remained on visiting terms with his family and he had many devoted admirers among bridge players, but he had no close friends until some of his younger relatives were older. The eldest of these, and Bruce's favorite, was young Peter Hambly. When Bruce was ninety-nine, he decided to become Peter's mentor and began teaching him the secrets of the Bridge Masters. Bruce and Peter happened to have the same birthday, September 22.

"You had better come and live with me, Peter, my boy," said Bruce one day, "and then we can play bridge every day and celebrate our birthdays together." At that time, Peter was still in his tweens, as the bridge players called the inept twenties, the years between childhood and automatically becoming a Life Master at age thirty-three.

Twelve more years passed. Each year, the local bridge players had given Peter and Bruce lively combined birthday parties at the club, but now something quite exceptional was being planned for that autumn. Bruce was going to be eleventy-one (111), a rather curious number and a very respectable age for a bridge expert (Oswald Jacoby himself had reached only 130), and Peter was going to be thirty-three, an important milestone for a bridge player.

The party naturally involved a duplicate game, and during the course of the evening, I watched the pair negotiate the following hand.

Dealer West. NS vul.

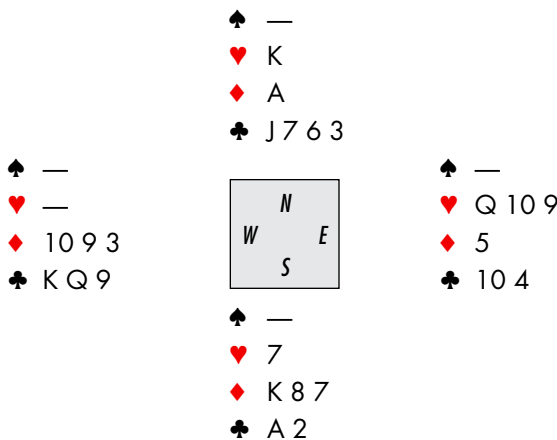
	Bruce				
	♠ 6 4 3				
	♥ A K J 3				
	♦ A Q				
	♣ J 7 6 3				
♠ —	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 60px; height: 60px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W E</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W E	S	♠ 9 8 7 5 2
N					
W E					
S					
♥ 8 6 2		♥ Q 10 9 4			
♦ J 10 9 3 2		♦ 6 5			
♣ K Q 9 8 5		♣ 10 4			
	Peter				
	♠ A K Q J 10				
	♥ 7 5				
	♦ K 8 7 4				
	♣ A 2				

West	Bruce	East	Peter
pass	1NT	pass	2♥*
2NT	pass	pass	dbl
3♣	dbl	pass	4♣
pass	4♦	pass	4NT*
pass	5♥*	pass	6♣
all pass			

West, who was not a particularly skilled player, felt the need to be active and so he tried a kamikaze unusual notrump overcall. Terence Reese, who counseled against giving away information in the auction when you are unlikely to buy the hand, would not have approved. And in this case, for certain, he would have been right.

Peter received the opening lead of the ♦J. He won this trick in dummy with the queen and drew all five rounds of trumps, throwing hearts from dummy. He had noted that East had failed to give preference after the 2NT overcall — obviously, he wanted West to suffer through playing the hand. Peter had also seen two heart discards from West so far.

After he cashed the ♥A, to which West followed, Peter concluded that West had begun with 0=3=5=5 shape. These cards remained...



...and Peter claimed, citing a criss-cross squeeze on West.

Challenged by the opponents, he explained. “I know West has kept 3-3 in the minors and I’m going to play the ♥K next. If he discards a diamond, I cash the ♦Q and cross to hand with the ♣A to cash the ♦K and ♦8. A club is no better a choice, for then I can play ace and another club. West wins the ♣K but then dummy is high.”

The opponents conceded and Bruce smiled affectionately. “Well done, nephew!” he roared. “Now you are ready for the Nationals.”

The next morning they climbed into Bruce’s Studebaker and set off. I happened to meet up with them later, just as they arrived at the tournament.

“Uncle Bruce, I don’t understand why we’re going on a cruise ship,” complained Peter. “I thought the Nationals were being played in a convention center!”

“Peter, you must learn to listen when grownups speak to you. The hotels are sold out for the entire ten days, so the ACBL is putting us on this ship and running some extra tournament sections here. Yes, there’s an upcharge of a thousand dollars per player, but what’s a couple of grand, more or less, when you’re attending a national tournament?”

“Well, let’s get settled in at least — ah, here comes a director now.” Peter flagged down a passing official. “Excuse me, I’m sorry to bother you, but we’ve lost our way.”

“Where do you want to go?”

“Our cabins, of course.”

“Cabins?”

“Yes, where we sleep.”

“The elevator to the forward berths is right over there. You want Deck 2.”

“Thank you. Uncle Bruce, I was right, this is the way.”

“Good! They’ve probably put our luggage in the cabin already. I must say I’m tired.”

“Do you wonder? After that long drive down from Ontario?”

“No, Peter, I suppose I don’t. But we’ll have a great tournament now, though, won’t we?”

“For sure. I have to say, though, Uncle Bruce, I still don’t see how we can be playing in the Nationals if we’re in the middle of the Caribbean.”

“Technology, my boy, technology. You know how we punch our pair number into that little black box before every round? Well, our results are posted into a database that will compare them to the other scores in our section and rank us all, wherever we’re playing. That’s how you can see a percentage immediately, which shows how we fared against the field. Not your mother’s duplicate game, eh, Peter?”

Having no playing commitments of my own until the next day, I followed to see what their cabin looked like. As they made their way forward, a tall man in a suit and tie waylaid them.

“Are you planning to play the Open Pairs, gentlemen?” he asked.

“Why, yes — when does the first session start?”

“In about a quarter of an hour, more or less. You need to get seated.”

“We haven’t bought an entry yet. How do we know which table to sit at?”

“Choose one. It doesn’t matter. Just type your pair number and direction into that little machine on the table. Make sure your opponents do the same before you play any hands.”

“Our opponents?”

“They’ll be along right away. The room is starting to fill up, the game will start shortly. When the round is over, the machine will display the number of the table you are to proceed to next. Everybody moves, North-South and East-West.”

“I guess we’ll figure it out.” Peter turned to Bruce. “We can find the cabin later — time to play bridge.”

“All right. I’ll just find a washroom and be right back.”

Peter had no sooner found a vacant table and sat down when a pleasant-looking middle-aged couple walked over. I thought they looked vaguely familiar but couldn’t place them.

“Good afternoon! May we join you? I’m Charlie and this is Helen.”

“Please sit down. My partner will be back in just a moment. I’m Peter.”

“Pleased to meet you. Whom are you playing with?”

“Bruce Gowdy — do you know him?”

“Oh yes. You should have a drink, you’ll need it. Steward!”

“Yes, sir?”

“Coffee for me and the lady, scotch on the rocks for my young friend here.”

“Certainly, sir.”

The drinks and Bruce arrived, as did a caddy with boards. I had no plans to play in this event, so I pulled up a chair behind Peter.

“Bruce, these folks are Charlie and Helen.”

“I think we may have met before — good afternoon. Into the booze already, Peter?”

The director announced that they could start play, and the competition commenced. The second board saw Charlie bid an aggressive slam:

Dealer East; E-W vul.

		Charlie												
		♠ A Q 3												
		♥ A 6 4												
		♦ A 8 4 3												
		♣ A 5 2												
Peter		<table border="1"><tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr><tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr></table>		N		W		E		S			Bruce	
	N													
W		E												
	S													
♠ 5				♠ 10 9 6										
♥ K J 10 9 3 2				♥ 8 5										
♦ Q 2				♦ J 10 9 7 6										
♣ K J 9 6				♣ 10 7 4										
		Helen												
		♠ K J 8 7 4 2												
		♥ Q 7												
		♦ K 5												
		♣ Q 8 3												

West	North	East	South
		pass	1♠
2♥	dbl*	pass	2♠
pass	6♠	all pass	

With four unattractive suits to choose from, Peter opted to start with his singleton trump. Helen surveyed her prospects. She won the first trick with the ♠A, cashed the spade queen, and continued with two top diamonds and a diamond ruff in hand. When Peter showed out on this trick, any hope of a three-suit squeeze vanished. The best chance

now was a Belladonna strip-squeeze in the pointed suits, which would require West to have begun with 1=6=2=4 shape and to hold the ♣K plus at least two of ♣J, ♣10, and ♣9.

Helen played another round of trumps to reach this position:

	Charlie					
	♠ —					
	♥ A 6 4					
	♦ 8					
	♣ A 5 2					
Peter	<table border="1" style="margin: auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W E</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W E	S	Bruce	
N						
W E						
S						
♠ —		♠ —				
♥ K J 10		♥ 8 5				
♦ —		♦ J 10				
♣ K J 9 6		♣ 10 7 4				
	Helen					
	♠ 8 7					
	♥ Q 7					
	♦ —					
	♣ Q 8 3					

On the next trump, if Peter threw a low club, the last trump would indeed signal his doom: he would be thrown in via whatever suit he discarded from, to lead away from his king in the remaining suit. So he discarded the ♣9 and played the ♣J on the final spade — a valiant effort, but not good enough. Helen simply led a club. Seeing the end-play coming, Peter rose with the king, but Helen won with the ace and finessed the ♣8 on the way back, losing only a heart trick at the end.

Bruce was impressed. “Now I’m sure I’ve met you before — who are you exactly?”

“Ask Charlie,” replied Helen, smiling, as she moved for the next round.

The rest of the session proceeded similarly, with the opponents playing double-dummy, while Peter and Bruce had a pajama game, alternate tops and bottoms. There was a break between sessions and they retired to the smoking room for much-needed respite. I tagged along for lack of anything better to do.

STORY ORIGINS

1. *The Fellowship of the Ring* by J.R.R. Tolkien; *Outward Bound* by Sutton Vane
2. “The Landlady” by Roald Dahl
3. *The Adventures of Marco Polo*, Richard J. Walsh ed.
4. “The Secret Lover” by Peter Lovesey
5. “Mr. Bearstowe Says” by Anthony Berkeley
6. *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous* by George Berkeley
7. “In the Fog” by Richard Harding Davis
8. “Exclusive report: Occupy Movement’s ‘Black Bloc’ anarchists Demand Government Handouts” by Kyle Becker
<http://www.conservativedailynews.com/2012/04/exclusive-report-occupy-movements-black-bloc-anarchists-demand-government-handouts/>
9. “Mr. Loveday’s Little Outing” by Evelyn Waugh

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DAVID SILVER (Toronto, Canada) is the author of four previous ‘Professor Silver’ story collections, the most recent being *The Naked Bridge Player*.



TIM BOURKE (Australia) is a bridge journalist and perhaps the world’s foremost collector of bridge books, magazines and interesting hands.

